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ABSTRACT

This brief paper summarizes requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 related to persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. The following topics are addressed: what is meant by "hard of hearing" and deafness; the effect of hearing loss on communication at work; types of jobs that people who are deaf or hard of hearing have; accommodations for the individual who is deaf or hard of hearing during the employee selection process (such as allowing help with completing the written application and using a sign language interpreter during the job interview); enhancing productivity on the job; and on-the-job accommodations to enhance communication in face-to-face, interactive distance communication, group situations, and performance evaluations. Examples of such accommodations include using assistive listening devices, ensuring availability of Text Telephones, and using captioned video training materials. A listing of 12 resources is provided. (DB)

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WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH PERSONS WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING

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Who is Considered Deaf or Hard of Hearing?

Hearing loss affects between 21 and 28 million Americans (about 10% of the U.S. population). The loss may range from mild (difficulty with or inability to hear soft sounds) to profound (difficulty with or inability to hear loud sounds). Generally speaking, this group can be divided into persons who are either hard of hearing or deaf.

Persons who are hard of hearing represent roughly 20 to 22 million people. The term "hard of hearing" refers to a hearing loss from 25dB (mild loss) to 90dB (severe loss). An individual with this degree of loss frequently communicates using a combination of strategies that rely on residual auditory ability enhanced by a hearing aid or assistive listening device and often supplemented through lipreading or other visual means.

Deafness is a low prevalence condition, affecting approximately one and a half-million persons. The term "deaf" refers to a hearing loss greater than 90dB (profound hearing loss). Persons are considered "deaf" if their hearing loss is such that they are unable to hear or understand speech and must rely on vision for communication. Persons who are deaf in the United States, especially those who are born deaf or lose their hearing at an early age, generally prefer to communicate using American Sign Language through sign language interpreters, or through reading, writing, or other visual means. Persons who are deaf and lose their hearing later in life, sometimes referred to as "late deafened", may have different communication preferences and rely on residual hearing, lipreading, captioning, or perhaps English based sign language.

What is the Impact of Hearing Loss at Work?

Research on the employment of workers who are deaf or hard of hearing indicates that on-the-job communication can be affected by the following factors.

- Lack of notetakers/assistive listening devices for meetings.
- No sign classes for hearing workers.
- No professional interpreters are made available as needed for job interviews, performance reviews, group meetings, and other situations.
- Co-workers have difficulty communicating with them.
- Supervisors have difficulty communicating with them.
- Poor (non-professional) interpreters are used.
- Written notes and company memos are often expressed in a level of English inappropriate to the reading abilities of particular deaf and hearing workers.

Consequently, employers often need to be prepared to make accommodations for employees who are deaf or hard of hearing in activities requiring communication. Examples of these activities include following detailed instruction, teamwork, adapting to change, or interacting with co-workers and supervisors.

What Types of Jobs Do Persons Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing Have?

Persons who are deaf or hard of hearing can perform the majority of jobs available. However, there are factors that create communication barriers that can limit their participation in the workplace. These factors include physical and environmental barriers such as noise, light level within a room, and distance from a speaker. Attitudinal barriers are also factors that can limit participation of persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. They include stereotyping, ignorance, and focus on disability (limitations) rather than ability (strengths).

With few exceptions, persons who are deaf or hard of hearing, if given appropriate training and accommodations, have the same range of job options as any other person. There are indeed no jobs that are just for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing; they are employed in as diverse range of jobs as people who hear. In recent years, several persons who are deaf or hard of hearing have been successful in high profile jobs that require excellent communication skills, e.g., screen actors

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and President of the United States. Given their capabilities and provision of appropriate accommodations, persons with hearing losses can be productive employees in most any job. Persons who are deaf or hard of hearing have been successful as...

architects	mechanics
artists	merchants
computer programmers	physicians
corporate managers	postal workers
entrepreneurs	psychologists
financial consultants	lawyers
telecommunications technicians	salespersons
	teachers
	judges

Success on the job depends to a large degree upon the skill and attitudes of the worker as well as the willingness and ability of the employer to identify and resolve communication barriers encountered in the workplace. Appropriate accommodations may be implemented in all phases of employment, from participation in the selection process to training and advancement. Once an employer learns an applicant or employee is deaf or hard of hearing and in need of an accommodation, the employer may be required by the Americans with Disabilities Act to provide the needed accommodation.

Accommodating the Person Who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing During the Employee Selection Process

During the selection process, employers must determine if the deaf or hard of hearing applicant is capable of performing the essential functions of the job. It is critical to obtain an accurate picture of the applicant and his or her background, skills, and abilities to do the job. Typically this process involves two steps: screening written job applications and interviewing prospective applicants.

Some applicants who are deaf or hard of hearing may have difficulty in reading and comprehending written applications, especially those that are heavily loaded with complicated English phrases or unfamiliar terms. Appropriate accommodations may include such strategies as allowing the person to take an application and obtain their own assistance in filling it out, allowing more time for completion, or providing a sign language interpreter. When an applicant notifies you about their hearing loss, the simplest strategy is to ask the applicant what appropriate accommodations are needed.

Accommodations may also be required during selection interviews. Minimally, interviews should be sensitive to the range of communication abilities of persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. Simple accommodations may include conducting the interview in a quiet, well-lit environment that minimizes visual distractions. The interviewer must be willing to use the interviewee's assistive listening device, if one is used. Talk at a normal pace and at a normal volume. If asked, be willing to repeat questions, converse at a different pace or volume, or try other strategies like note writing. Avoid sitting in front of bright lights or windows which make it difficult to speech read.

If requested, use an effective professional sign language interpreter. When using the interpreter, speak directly to the applicant, not the interpreter. The role of the interpreter is to facilitate communication, not explain or participate in the interview. All information shared in the interview is confidential and will not be disclosed by the interpreter to other parties. Referrals for professional sign language interpreters may be obtained from public or private agencies such as the local vocational rehabilitation office, the state commission for the deaf, or by consulting the telephone directory.

If group interviews are conducted, it is important to speak with one person at a time. Be sure the deaf or hard of hearing applicant knows that the interviewer is speaking before the interviewer or other persons in the room speak . Remember, your goal is to obtain an accurate picture of the person's skills, experience, and capabilities to do the job--not to miss this information due to communication difficulties.

Enhancing Productivity on the Job

Research has also documented that employers frequently rate deaf and hard of hearing workers as better or about the same as hearing co-workers in task performance (e.g., quality/quantity of output, attendance, safety, working without supervision). Workers give themselves similar ratings. However, both groups prioritized the following factors as critical to job retention and advancement:

- Access to periodic training to upgrade skills
- Access to staff and small group meetings
- Reassignment of job duties
- Use of interpreters
- Availability of Text Telephones (TTs) and assistive listening devices (ALDs)
- Rearranging rooms for good visual communication.

On the Job Accommodation to Enhance Communication

Enhancing the performance of the employee who is deaf or hard of hearing does not necessarily have to be expensive or require a great deal of equipment. In many instances, communication accommodations may be useful to all employees, not just those who are deaf or hard of hearing. The most important consideration is to identify the communication situations in which the deaf or hard of hearing employee is experiencing difficulty. The responsibility to improve or minimize communication barriers in these situations is equally shared by all persons in the workplace, those who are hearing, hard of hearing, or deaf. The following are examples of accommodations that could facilitate communication in a variety of situations:

Face to Face Situations

- ensure that the office and/or work environment is adequately lighted
- consider placing the worker in a quieter environment if environmental noise interferes with communication
- arrange the work station in a way that the worker can readily see when someone is entering their office or work-site

- use assistive listening devices when needed
- use interpreters (oral and/or sign) when needed
- be aware of your personal habits that may serve as barriers to comfortable speechreading. Examples include hands in front of mouth, not directly facing employee, and chewing while talking
- encourage co-workers and supervisors to learn sign language by offering training classes

Interactive Distance Communication Situations

- ensure the availability of Text Telephones (TTs, also commonly referred to as TDDs or TTYs), amplification devices, or other appropriate assistive listening devices (ALDs) to help facilitate communication between other employees or customers
- use state telecommunication relay services, where an intermediate person receives verbal information and types it to the person using a TT. The "800" toll free phone numbers for these services are listed in local phone directories
- consider E-mail for intra and interoffice communication
- provide visual or tactile pagers for communication, instructions, and as an alerting system
- share information via networked computers
- use computer notetaking
- try FAX machines for intra or interoffice, and customer communication
- provide visual and auditory alerting devices on telephones and fire alarm systems

Group Situations

- ensure that all rooms used for meetings or training are adequately lighted
- utilize assistive listening devices such as FM, infared, loop systems, and/or closed-captioning decoders in meeting and training sessions
- try real-time captioning for meetings and training sessions (simultaneously captioning as speaker speaks)
- caption video training materials
- use professional interpreters (oral and/or sign) when needed
- use notetakers in meetings and groups
- consider "communication cops" at meetings (one person who monitors the meeting to ensure that only one person speaks at a time)
- provide mentors and coaches

Performance Evaluations

Performance evaluations are typically based upon a written review coupled with a face-to-face interview. If reading ability necessitates extra time, provide workers with written information in advance. Since barrier-free communication is critical, use multiple strategies as necessary to ensure success. Multiple strategies include use of professional interpreters (sign or oral), computers, ALDs, and other appropriate strategies.

Resources

Prior to contacting any of the following resources, it is important to remember that the person with the most information and experience regarding needed workplace accommodations is the job applicant or worker. Ask the individual to tell you what accommodation(s) work best for that person in face-to-face, interactive distance, and group communication situations. If additional information or assistance is needed, consult the following resources.

University Resources

University of Arkansas RRTC for Persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, 4601 West Markham, Little Rock, AR 72205, 501/686-9691 V/TT

Northern Illinois University RRTC for Persons who are Traditionally Underserved, Department of Communicative Disorders, DeKalb, IL 60115, 815/753-6520 V/TT

Job Accommodations Network, West Virginia University, P.O. Box 6080, Morgantown, WV 26506-6080, 800/526-7234 V/TT

Gallaudet University, National Information Center of Deafness, 800 Florida Avenue, NE, Washington, DC 20002, 202/651-5051 V/TT

National Technical Institute for the Deaf, National Center on Employment of the Deaf, 1 Lomb Memorial Drive, Rochester, NY 14623, 716/475-6205 V/TT

Consumer Organizations

National Association of the Deaf, 814 Thayer Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20910, 301/587-1789 TT, 301/587-1788 V

Self Help for Hard of Hearing People, Inc., 7800 Wisconsin Avenue, Bethesda, MD 20814, 301/657-2249 TT, 301/657-2248 V

Association for Late-Deafened Adults, P.O. Box 641763, Chicago, IL 60664, 312/604-4192 TT

Professional Organizations

American Deafness and Rehabilitation Association, P.O. Box 21554, Little Rock, AR 72225, 501/663-7074 V/TT

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 10801 Rockville Pike, Rockville, MD 20852, 800/638-8255 V/TT

Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc., 8719 Colesville Road, Suite 310, Silver Spring, MD 20910, 301/608-0050 V/TT

Regional/State Resources

ADA Regional Disability Business Technical Assistance Center Hotline, 800/949-4232 V/TT

State Vocational and Independent Living Rehabilitation and/or State Office or Commission for the Deaf, listed in local phone books and directory assistance

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For more information write to: University of Arkansas Research and Training Center for Persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, 4601 West Markham Street, Little Rock, AR 72205, 501/686-9691

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OTHER TITLES IN THIS *IMPLEMENTING THE ADA* SERIES ARE:

Working Effectively with People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Working Effectively with People who are Blind or Visually Impaired

Working Effectively with Persons who have Cognitive Disabilities

Workplace Accommodations for Persons with Musculoskeletal Disorders

Working Effectively with Employees who have Sustained a Brain Injury

Employing and Accommodating Workers with Psychiatric Disabilities

Employing and Accommodating Individuals with Histories of Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Employment Considerations for People who have Diabetes

Accommodating the Allergic Employee in the Workplace

Causes of Poor Indoor Air Quality and What You Can Do About It

Working Effectively with People with Learning Disabilities

Working Effectively with Individuals who are HIV-Positive

These and other informational brochures can be accessed on the World Wide Web at:
www.ilr.cornell.edu/ped/ada

For further information about publications such as these, contact the ILR Program on Employment and Disability, Cornell University, 102 ILR Extension, Ithaca, New York 14853-3901; or at ***607/255-2906*** *(Voice),* ***607/255-2891*** *(TTY), or* ***607/255-2763*** *(Fax).*